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DOI:

[10.1075/ps.8.2.01szc](https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.8.2.01szc)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

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Citation for published version (APA):

Szczepek Reed, B. (2017). "Can I say something?": Meta turn-taking in natural talk. *Pragmatics and Society*, 8(2), 161-182. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.8.2.01szc>

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“Can I say something?”: Meta turn-taking in natural talk

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Abstract

In English the organization of talk into turns is routinely accomplished through a complex system of implicit, non-lexical cues. However, explicit verbalizations, such as “I haven’t finished” or “Can I say something?” do exist. This paper investigates instances in which participants employ meta formulations to structure their interaction. It describes their forms, sequential locations and interactional relevance. Speakers are found to make meta references to turn beginnings, both their own and those of others, and turn completions, typically by others. Meta turn-taking actions are used as a last resort, after other, implicit turn-taking strategies have failed; as a strategy to secure turn space; as a way of eliciting specific next actions; as a practice for initiating repair; and as a more general strategy for committing to a specific course of action.

Key words: Turn-taking; turn beginning; turn completion; speaker selection; meta talk; formulations.

1. Introduction

Conversationalists accomplish turn-taking through a complex interplay and coordination of implicit linguistic and embodied cues. By default, they do not rely on lexical items, such as "roger" or "I've finished". This paper investigates those rare instances in which participants do verbalize turn-taking through explicit lexical means. It asks what forms such meta references take in naturally occurring talk and explores their interactional locations, functions and relevance.

An extensive field of literature has shown that the split-second management of speaker change in conversation relies on combinations of interactionally relevant contrasts in language (grammar, meaning, sound patterns) and embodied actions (gestures, torso movements, gaze) that are designed to fit specific sequential locations.¹ The cues themselves do not carry inherent turn-related meaning; for example, low falling pitch does not "mean" turn completion, but in co-occurrence with other cues it can be used and interpreted by participants as bringing a turn-at-talk to an end. In other contexts a fall-to-low contributes to different sequential and social actions.

In the light of these considerations it is particularly remarkable that there are instances of meta talk where participants explicitly verbalize turn-taking practices. A lexical reference to a conversational action does not automatically mean that the action being referred to is indeed the one being performed by the referencing turn. Like other practices, meta phrases such as *let me stop you now*, or *carry on* have to be analyzed in the interactional context they occur in; their lexical content does not give them an exclusive functional meaning as turn-taking strategies. Nevertheless, meta references to conversational structure have the potential to bring to the surface of interaction those otherwise implicit the turn- and sequence-related negotiating processes that underlie spontaneous talk.

2. Data

The majority of data for this study come from the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois et al. 2000; 2003; 2004; 2005) available at <http://www.talkbank.org/data/Conversation>. The corpus consists of 60 recordings of spontaneous talk. Most recordings are of unmotivated, naturally occurring conversations, some contain institutional or professional talk, and a minority contains monologues,

which have been excluded from this collection. One extract has been taken from the NIE Corpus of Spoken Singapore English, (Deterding and Low 2001), available online at <http://videoweb.nie.edu.sg/phonetic/niecsse/>

All data extracts have been transcribed according to an adapted version of the GAT transcription conventions, which are designed to show aspects of the prosodic delivery such as intonational phrasing, pitch accents and stress, lengthening, loudness, and voice quality (Selting *et al.* 1998, see Appendix).

3. Talking about talk

While meta turn-taking strategies are rare in ordinary conversation, they have been noticed in some forms of institutional talk. In particular, meta management of turn allocation is characteristic of certain institutional environments (Heritage 2004), such as news interviews (Greatbatch 1988; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991), chaired meetings (Cuff and Sharrock 1985), classroom interaction (McHoul 1978; Mehan 1985), courtroom interaction (Atkinson and Drew 1979), mediation (Garcia 1991) and counseling (Peräkylä 1995). However, meta turn-taking has so far not been investigated in its own right, neither in institutional nor in ordinary talk-in-interaction. A first noticing of an example from ordinary talk led to the collection of more instances.

(1) SBC033 Guilt

- 1 Leann: Apropos something [JENNifer said in MAY;
- 2 Laura: [well WAIT -
- 3 you know [liz
- 4 Don: [MA,
- 5 [you HAVE to hear this;
- 6 -> Leann: [<< falsetto+f> WAIT WAIT - >
- 7 Jenn: WHAT -
- 8 -> Bill: [<<f> will you let leanne FINish;>
- 9 Jenn: [did i -
- 10 -> Leann: [<< falsetto+f> WAIT -
- 11 -> ↑TIME; >

12 -> <<falsetto> can i SAY sOmething - >
 13 (0.42)
 14 JENNifer and I and dana;
 15 had a HU::GE Argument in mAY;
 16 which creAteD a RIFT;
 17 for about a DAY.

Extract (1) is part of a longer sequence in which one family member, Leanne, argues with her mother. Other family members join in at different points in time. Line 1 shows an attempt by Leanne to initiate a new sequence. However, several other participants are either still talking or coming in at this point. The overall speaking volume is high. Leanne pursues her attempt to take the floor by shouting *wait wait wait time* in falsetto voice (lines 6, 10f). She is supported in her efforts by Bill whose explicit turn *will you let Leanne finish* is also characterized by increased loudness (line 8). The first turn to be produced in the clear is Leanne's *can I say something*, still in falsetto voice (line 12). Following her turn preface, or pre- (Schegloff 1968; 1980; 2007), Leanne goes on to deliver the projected narrative, her voice gradually easing back into its default range (lines 14-17).

The extract displays several instances of explicit verbalizations of the mechanics of conversation. Leanne's repair initiation *wait wait wait time* is designed to bring other speakers' talk to a halt, as is Bill's plea *will you let Leanne finish*. Leanne's turn preface *can I say something* explicitly initiates a turn by which she eventually accomplishes turn possession.

In the following, such meta turn-taking actions are analyzed in more detail. Two related forms of meta language have been excluded from this investigation. The first concerns participants' negotiations over what is being talked about, an issue frequently referred to by participants as the "subject" or "topic", and verbalized through phrases such as 'what are you talking about' or 'change the subject'. Also excluded are turns that explicitly reference linguistic domains such as grammar, lexis and prosody, as in phrases such as 'we need a verb' and 'let's talk about this slowly'. Instead, the focus is on participants'

explicit management of turn allocation, continuation and completion through meta references to the turn-taking action being pursued.

4. Forms and functions of meta turn-taking

The corpus contains 56 examples of meta references to turn-taking. They can be categorized into three practices: meta turn initiations of speakers' own turns, referred to here as 'meta self-starts'; meta turn initiations of other speakers' turns, referred to as 'explicit prompts'; and meta completions of other speakers' turns, referred to as 'meta cut-offs'. While it is clear in many instances that participants are referring to issues of either turn or sequence, some cases display an overlap between the two, and references to the one simultaneously reference the other.

4.1 Meta self-starts: Securing and legitimizing turn space

Explicit self-starts typically occur in the form of preliminaries, or pre-s (Schegloff 1968; 1980; 2007). The corpus holds 18 instances. A typical example is extract (1), reprinted below.

(1) SBC033 Guilt

- 1 Leann: Apropos something [JENNifer said in MAY;
- 2 Laura: [well WAIT -
- 3 you know [liz
- 4 Don: [MA,
- 5 [you HAVE to hear this;
- 6 -> Leann: [<< falsetto+f> WAIT WAIT - >
- 7 Jenn: WHAT -
- 8 -> Bill: [<<f> will you let leanne FINish;>
- 9 Jenn: [did i -
- 10 -> Leann: [<< falsetto+f> WAIT -
- 11 -> ↑TIME; >
- 12 -> <<falsetto> can i SAY sOomething - >
- 13 (0.42)

14 JENNifer and I and dana;
 15 had a HU::GE Argument in mAY;
 16 which creAted a RIFT;
 17 for about a DAY.

Leanne's meta self-start *can I say something* (line 12) occurs after several attempts to claim the floor. The sequence-initiating turn *apropos something Jennifer said in May* (line 1) is Leanne's third repetition of this utterance and follows repeated attempts to join the interaction during a sequence characterized by extensive overlap. Her previous attempts prior to the transcribed section have been delivered with high pitch, increased loudness and high speech rate, finally culminating in her meta self-start, for which she raises her pitch level further into falsetto voice (lines 6, 10-12). Leanne's prosodic delivery is that of illegitimate turn competition as described by French and Local (1986): higher-than-default pitch and loudness typically characterize full turns that are delivered while other participants are still speaking. Her prosody thus shows her to be designing her talk as competing for the floor.

Although the meta self-start *can I say something* is verbally presented as a request and potential first pair part it is not verbally treated as such by other participants: no one explicitly grants Leanne turn space, for example through the use of phrases such as 'go ahead' or 'sure'. However, the 0.42-second silence (line 13) shows an implicit and tacit granting of the request.

Leanne's repeated failure to gain the floor prior to her explicit self-start and the subsequent success of her meta reference in securing an opportunity to talk show the explicit formulation to be used here as a final attempt, or 'last resort' for securing the floor after other, more conventional attempts have failed. Neither the 'implicit' practice of starting up at a possible transition relevance place with a turn designed to introduce a new topic (*apropos something jennifer said in may*, line 1); nor repeated delivery of that turn with increased pitch register and loudness; nor meta formulations calling for other participants to suspend their ongoing talk (*wait wait wait time*, lines 6, 10, 11) are successful in creating an opportunity to deliver the projected next turn. The meta self-start can thus be considered a practice that is a) not routine; b) not the participant's first

choice in achieving her interactional goal, but a ‘last resort’; and c) successful in securing turn space.

Extract (2) shows another instance in which a meta self-start is used after a previous, implicit attempt was unsuccessful. The participants are speaking on the telephone around Christmas time.

(2) SBC052 Oh You Need a Breadbox

- 1 Darle: <<l+creaky>> SO;;
- 2 (0.48)
- 3 A:nyway.>
- 4 Cindy: huh:
- 5 (0.92)
- 6 Darle: BUT –
- 7 (1.35)
- 8 -> Cindy: .hh [so WHAT did you gEt-
- 9 Darle: [and now HOW did we get on THA:T.
- 10 Cindy: huh?
- 11 Darle: I don't KNOW how we GOT on that.
- 12 (1.12)
- 13 Cindy: I cAn't underSTAND you.
- 14 Darle: i don't know HOW we got on THA:T.
- 15 Cindy: NO;
- 16 I I don't know;
- 17 Oh i-
- 18 we were TALKing about bOOKs.
- 19 I don't KNOW;
- 20 (0.27)
- 21 hOw we JUMPED to thAt.
- 22 (0.22)
- 23 Darle: [UH -
- 24 Cindy: [.hhh

25 -> but -
 26 -> whA's i gonna;
 27 -> OH uhm;;
 28 -> ASK you;
 29 whAt'd you gEt for CHRISTmas;
 30 (0.91)
 31 Darle: OH -
 32 some EARrings,

In this extract the meta self-start follows a prolonged sequence closing including two repairs. An initial sequence closing by Darlene that contains lengthening, pausing and restarts (lines 1-7) is followed by a simultaneous start-up from both participants (line 8f). While Darlene continues the sequence closing (*and how did we get on that*, line 9), Cindy sets out to initiate a new sequence (*so what did you get-*, line 8). The overlap generates a sequence of two repairs (lines 10-14) before Cindy continues the sequence closing (lines 15-23). In a second attempt to initiate the new sequence she produces an explicit self-start (*but wha's I gonna oh uhm ask you*, lines 25-28). This prefacing turn contains the change-of-state token *oh*, designing the preface and its topic as new (Heritage, 1984; 1998) in spite of its previous mentioning (line 8). Like the turn *can I say something* in extract (1) Cindy's meta self-start re-does a previously attempted conversational activity, this time a topic change. While the turn at line 8 shows a default, implicit attempt lines 25ff show the explicit strategy being successfully employed.

The meta self-starts in (1) and (2) occur after prolonged sequences of noticeable interactional repairables such as unsuccessful floor entry (in (1)) and repair over a sequence closing (in (2)). In these sequences meta self-starts are used after other, implicit strategies have failed to accomplish their interactional purpose. They are treated as a "last resort" and prove successful in accomplishing previously failed activities.

Extract (3), too, shows a meta self-start in the form of a potential first pair part. In this extract the explicit practice is not used for the purpose of securing otherwise unattainable turn space.

9

1 Jeff: WOULdn't the whole place just LAUGH?

2 Jill: ↑YEAH::;

3 i think that's so FUNNy.

4 (0.36)

5 Jeff: tch. .hh Okay;

6 Anyway.

7 -> .hh can i (.) rUn this BY you rea[lly quIck?

8 -> Jill: [uHU?

9 (0.77)

10 Jeff: thEre:'s this SCIENtist;

11 that cAme up with Irrefutable PROOF;

This instance follows a sequence closing (lines 1-5). In contrast to extract (1) there is no sign here of turn competition preceding the verbalized self-start, no apparent prior interactional difficulty and no upgraded prosodic delivery. While the meta turn *can I say something* in extract (1) is used as a last resort after other turn-taking strategies have failed the explicit nature of the turn *can I run this by you really quick* is not necessitated by interactional competition.

In spite of this non-competitive environment Jeff's meta formulation contains the apologetic adverbial phrase *really quick*. This does not seem motivated by local turn-related behaviour. Jeff may be asking his partner's permission to keep her on the phone a little longer as they have been talking for a while and she has a visitor staying with her. However, his conversational actions themselves do not seem to require an apology. In contrast, the turn *can I say something* in extract (1) with its extended overlap and illegitimate turn competition contains no such qualifying language.

Another difference between the two uses is subsequent speakers' treatment of the meta turn reference. In (3) Jill treats Jeff's turn as a first pair part requesting turn space for an upcoming telling. Her acknowledgement token in reply to Jeff's explicit self-start (line 8) grants him the floor and treats his self-initiating turn as projecting more talk from him. In

contrast, the meta self-start in (1), although verbally designed as a potential first pair part, is not treated as such by other participants.

The differences between (1) and (3) regarding turn competition, the use of apologetic language and next participant uptake suggest that the meta formulation in (3) is employed to achieve a primarily sequential goal rather than local turn transition. Jeff's explicit self-start initiates a new sequence while seeking permission for an extended turn space (Schegloff 1980, see below). This is in contrast to (1), where the meta reference to an upcoming turn is used primarily to secure an opportunity to speak and thus is used for the very purpose it explicitly refers to: creating a chance for the speaker to *say something* in the face of an environment where *saying something* has proven difficult.

The above examples are reminiscent of the phenomenon of preliminaries to preliminaries, or pre-pre-s, described in Schegloff (1980). In analyzing turn projections such as *I'd like to ask you something* or *I have a big favor to ask you*, Schegloff (1980) shows that although these turns project an action – for example a question or a favor – they are very rarely followed by that projected action but by additional preliminary material before the projected action is finally performed. Even in cases where they do seem to be followed by the projected action that action is shown to be a preliminary in itself. Therefore turn projections of this kind are classified by Schegloff (1980) as preliminaries to preliminaries. The only exceptions seem to be instances where the action projected by the preliminary turn is one of interactional delicateness.

Meta self-starts also contain turn projections; however, not all of them follow the pattern described by Schegloff (1980). Extracts (1) and (2) show meta self-starts that are immediately followed by the turn they project. Similarly, in extract (3) the explicit self-start *can I run this by you really quick* is followed by acknowledgement from the co-participant and subsequently by the projected telling rather than by any additional preliminary material.

The finding that some meta self-starts are used as a last resort after other turn-taking strategies have failed is in line with a phenomenon described by Schegloff (1980). One of his segments contains an instance in which a turn projection is used to accomplish an action that has been produced in overlap on two prior occasions. The pre-pre seems to

“‘make room’” for the question to be asked in the clear. “An action projection may be used to get treatment as a ‘pre’ for an utterance that had previously failed to get such treatment. (...) Such an analysis also seems promising in that not a few of the instances of action projections in the collection occur in the environment of overlap” (1980, 131). The use of meta self-starts to secure contested turn space and re-do prior actions is, at least in this corpus, less common than their use for legitimization of upcoming talk and projection of specific next actions. While 15 instances perform primarily a legitimizing and projecting role only three cases are used as a ‘last resort’ in that they re-do a previous, non-explicit and unsuccessful initiation in an environment of turn- and sequence-related complications.

4.2 Explicit prompts: Eliciting and facilitating next actions

In this corpus there are 10 instances in which participants explicitly prompt other participants to take a turn. The majority (6 cases) are designed, grammatically and interactionally, as imperatives, using phrases such as *tell me X*, or *go ahead*. See, for example, extract (4) from a student-lecturer interaction.

(4) NIECSSE F5b

- 1 L: do you LIKE to go aBROAD?
- 2 S: .hh YES.
- 3 VERYy MUCH.
- 4 L: whEre do you like to GO to.
- 5 S: .hh whEre do I ↑LIKE to gO tO.
- 6 L: YEAH.
- 7 (0.36)
- 8 S: but I’ve NEver bEEen there rIght,
- 9 (0.31)
- 10 L: well what er:: -
- 11 -> tElI me where you HAVE been;
- 12 -> and Also where you [HAVEn’t been
- 13 S: [i’ve bEEen to auSTRAlia,

- 14 been to THAIland, .hh
 15 i've bEEEn to HONG KONG,

The lecturer's explicit prompt (lines 11-12) follows two repair initiations by the student (lines 5 and 8) concerning his initial conventionally formatted question *where do you like to go to* (line 4). The student initiates repair through verbal repetition with an accent on *like* (line 5), locating the repairable in this part of the previous turn (Schegloff 1996). The lecturer's affirmation (line 6) is not accepted as sufficient clarification and another repair initiation follows (line 8). The lecturer's response begins with an aborted turn (line 10), subsequent to which he explicitly prompts the next conversational action *tell me where you have been and also where you haven't been* (lines 11f), thus accomplishing repair. His turn makes explicit an activity, i.e. eliciting a telling, that was previously being done implicitly, i.e. by asking a question.

In this extract a meta turn-taking action is again used as a "last resort" after other cues have not been successful. The meta turn immediately accomplishes its purpose. The student begins her list of previous holiday destinations in transitional overlap with the end of the lecturer's explicit turn (line 13).

Another instance of explicit prompting is shown in extract (5) from the same telephone conversation as (3).

(5) 028 Hey cutie pie

- 1 Jeff: hOw's JOYCE.
 2 hOw's her state of MIND.
 3 does she seem (1.15) at PEACE with herself?
 4 is she HAPPy?
 5 Jill: uHU::;;
 6 oh YEAH::;;
 7 [she sEEms really GOOD.
 8 Jeff: [YEAH?
 9 (0.46)
 10 YEAH?

11 (0.24)
 12 Jill: uHU:?
 13 (0.56)
 14 -> Jeff: oKAY now;
 15 -> TELL me the STUFF that;
 16 -> .hh SHE doesn't want (0.52) you to TELL me.
 17 Jill: ehehehehehehe[hehe
 18 Jeff: [NOW that she's GONE.
 19 Jill: .hh NOW'S the CHANCE.
 20 Jeff: YEAH because reMEMber;
 21 (0.59)
 22 you're MY gIrlfriend;
 23 before you're HER FRIEND.
 24 Jill: hehehehehehe jeff
 25 Jeff: hehe
 26 Jill: ehehehe OH;;
 27 .hhh Oh SWEETie;;
 28 [ehehe
 29 Jeff: [reMEMber.
 30 you're gonna spend the rest of your life with M:E:.
 31 Jill: ehehehe
 32 Jeff: I:'M your partner [honey.
 33 Jill: [ehehe Oh JEFF;
 34 Jeff: i knOw there's STUFF that she-
 35 .hh that YOU [won't TELL me.
 36 Jill: [ehehehehe
 37 Jeff: and hehehehehe
 38 Jill: .hh OH: jEff;
 39 -> Jeff: gO a[HEAD;
 40 -> Jill: [↑NO;
 41 -> ↑NOTHING;

42 [there's-
 43 -> Jeff: [then let it OUT hOney,
 44 Jill: hehehehehe
 45 -> Jeff: <<stylized> come ON SWEETIE;>
 46 Jill: [hehehe
 47 -> Jeff: [<<stylized> come ON HONEY;>
 48 Jill: hehe
 49 -> Jeff: <<stylized> let it OUt like a good [GIRL;>
 50 Jill: [ehehehehe
 51 -> Jeff: like a G:OOD G::IRL;
 52 hehehe .hh
 53 Jill: .hh JEFF ehe
 54 OH::;
 55 (0.46)
 56 -> NO i WON'T;
 57 Jeff: you're SUCH a little GIGGly monster.

Jeff repeatedly attempts to elicit from his girlfriend Jill what she and his sister Joyce have been talking about (lines 14-16). After an initial enquiry concerning Joyce's state of mind is not elaborated on by Jill (lines 1-13) Jeff explicitly prompts a telling (lines 14-17). This explicit imperative to talk is met with laughter from Jill (line 17) but not with the requested information. Lines 18-38 show Jeff's playful but unsuccessful attempts at persuading Jill to give away the content of her conversations with Joyce. Line 39 contains another prompt by Jeff (*go ahead*), which this time is met by an outright refusal to comply from Jill (*no nothing*, lines 40f). This exchange shows how participants distinguish between turn and action-related aspects of talk: while Jeff's imperative to speak is met by Jill in the sense that she does produce talk as such (*no nothing*) his imperative to deliver a specific next action is not complied with. Lines 43-51 show more playful prompts. Again they are met with direct refusal (*no I won't*, line 56). Finally, Jeff gives up and introduces a topic change (line 57).

Extract (5) arguably represents another instance in which a verbalized turn-taking action re-does a previously unsuccessful and implicit attempt. In the immediately preceding sequence Jeff pursues an enquiry into Joyce's emotional state through four subsequent question TCUs (*how's Joyce? How's her state of mind? Does she seem at peace with herself? Is she happy?* lines 1-4). When Jill finally replies she does so with a simple affirmative answer (*uhu oh yeah she seems really good*, lines 5ff). Jeff continues to pursue his enquiry with *yeah?* (lines 8, 10) but Jill allows for extensive pausing and only provides a minimal response (*uhu*, line 12). It is at this point that Jeff launches his explicit imperative *tell me the stuff that she doesn't want you to tell me*. Given his immediately prior pursuit of information his formulation *tell me* does explicitly what questions and other first pair parts do implicitly: it allocates and attempts to elicit a response in the next available sequential slot.

Eliciting next actions after previous (implicit) attempts have proven problematic seems to be the main purpose of explicit prompts. 7 out of 10 cases follow this pattern. In the three remaining instances participants explicitly invite next speakers into multi-party conversations of three or more participants; once again, this seems to occur mainly when previous attempts have been unsuccessful. For example, in a discussion involving 15 participants one speaker's start-up is unsuccessful and another participant facilitates a second attempt by explicitly initiating her turn (*Diane started to say something*).

4.3 Meta cut-offs: managing turn transitions and repair initiation

Explicit turn closings seem to be produced by other participants rather than by current turn holders themselves. There are 21 instances of this phenomenon on the corpus. Roughly half of them (11 cases) contain the lexical item *wait*, or variations thereof, and are employed to bring other participants' turns to a halt and/or to initiate repair. The remaining 10 cases lexicalize turn closing as in *shut up* or *let me stop you*. This activity can frequently be found in non-serious environments or accompanying delicate social actions. While the second type often occurs in the vicinity of a previous participant's turn completion-in-progress meta cut-offs with *wait* often occur while the turn in question is still in full swing.

4.3.1 *Meta cut-offs with 'wait'*. Extract (6) shows a verbalized cut-off designed to bring an in-progress turn to a halt.

(6) SBC004 Raging Bureaucracy

- 1 Sharo: in the in the SECond grade i learned my TIMES tables;
- 2 in the THIRD grade i [knEw -
- 3 Carol: [FOURTH grade was;
- 4 Sharo: i had them MEMorized up [until twelve.
- 5 Carol: [FRACTIONS.
- 6 (0.79)
- 7 [I FAILED.
- 8 Sharo: [THESE KIDS;
- 9 [cAn't DO their tImes tAbles.
- 10 Carol: [hhehe
- 11 Sharo: the [FOURTHgraders even.
- 12 Kathy: [well they've just-
- 13 Sharo: [you know i have ONE STUdent.
- 14 Kathy: [they've been you know
- 15 Sharo: who KNOWS his tImes tables [up until ten
- 16 -> Carol: [<<p> wait>
- 17 Kathy: [they
- 18 -> Carol: <<h> HEY;>
- 19 Kathy: the tEAchers have just been [PASSing them alO:ng -
- 20 -> Carol: [<<h> WAIT a minute;>
- 21 NEITHer did I,>
- 22 Sharo: [YEAH;
- 23 Carol: [I didn't know them EITHer,
- 24 (0.31)
- 25 I didn't know tImes tables til s:: like FIFTH GRADE;

In the talk preceding Carol's interruption with *wait* Carol and Sharon have been speaking in overlap for some time (lines 2-10), followed by overlap between Kathy and Sharon (lines 11-15). Carol re-enters the conversation with explicit attempts to halt the talk-in-progress: *wait* (line 16) is spoken quietly and in overlap with a turn by Sharon; *hey* (line 18) is delivered with high pitch register and in the clear; while *wait a minute* (line 20) continues the high pitch register and is produced in overlap with an ongoing turn by Kathy. The explicit imperatives to 'wait' are designed to accomplish the very action that they are referencing, that is, 'waiting' to let Carol come in.

The extract also shows a second, more common use of *wait*. Carol, the interrupting participant, does so in an attempt not only to gain the floor but also to initiate self-repair: up to now the three speakers have been in agreement that they all knew their times tables in second grade. Carol's explicit attempt to come in to speak is followed by a correction: *wait hey wait a minute neither did I I didn't know them either I didn't know times tables til s like fifth grade* (lines 16-25).

Extract (7) shows the phrase *wait a second* being employed purely as a repair initiation rather than a turn competitive incoming.

(7) 044 He knows

- 1 Cam: thIs is the guy who doesn't know he's GAY.
- 2 (0.42)
- 3 Lajua: [YES.
- 4 Cam: [OR -
- 5 Isn't SURE if he's gay.
- 6 (0.32)
- 7 Lajua: YES.
- 8 who's nOw in the AIR force and lives in in sOUth carolIna.
- 9 (0.73)
- 10 SO.
- 11 (0.74)
- 12 -> Cam: <<p> WAIT a second.
- 13 (0.75)

- 14 I thought this w- guy t- was was MArried.>
 15 (0.69)
 16 Lajua: RON.
 17 (0.56)
 18 Cam: RON.
 19 he's MArried RIGHT?
 20 (0.26)
 21 Lajua: thAt's DArren.

It seems that while some meta cut-offs with *wait* are used primarily for turn competitive interruption others are employed mainly to initiate repair. One practice may possibly derive from the other: after locating a trouble source in a current speaker's turn co-participants have the choice to wait for that speaker to initiate self-repair (the preferred option, see Schegloff et al. 1977) or to initiate repair themselves, and if so, decide on a time to do so. In the second case participants may wait for the current turn to be completed or they may initiate repair while that turn is still ongoing. In the second instance they require a strategy for bringing the currently ongoing turn to a halt. Such a strategy can be found in the explicit *wait* construction, which allows participants to draw immediate attention to their intentions of interrupting a turn-in-progress. Employing a practice that is typically used for interrupting when no actual interruption is necessary has the potential to identify a trouble source in a co-participant's turn. By asking someone to *wait* when they are not actually speaking one infers that they are nevertheless in the process of doing something and that that something requires immediate attention. Meta cut-offs with *wait* are well fitted to accomplish repair initiation by offering a chronology of action: they allow participants to draw attention to a potential trouble source in a first step before repair can be accomplished in a next sequential slot.

4.3.2 Meta cut-offs with 'shut up' and its variants. In contrast to those explicit cut-offs that bring a current turn-in-progress to a halt, explicit verbalizations of turn closings tend to occur when previous speakers are already in the process of finishing their turn. See, for example, extract (8) below.

(8) SBC012 Appease the monster

- 1 Marci: dOn't forget to buy yourself a COOKie sheet,=
 2 before you go to make COOKies,
 3 Wend: [YEAH.
 4 Kevin: [and DON'T forget to take the TUPPerware out of your Oven;
 5 before you turn it O[N;
 6 -> Wend: [SH::USH up.
 7 (0.46)
 8 Marci: ehehe[hehehe
 9 Kendr: [ehehe OH YEAH;
 10 THAT TOO;

Extract (7) comes from the recording of a family birthday party. In this extract the meta cut-off is designed as a playful turn closing device. Lines 1*f* show Marci advising her daughter Kendra on how to use the baking set she has just received for her birthday: *don't forget to buy yourself a cookie sheet before you go to make cookies*. Lines 4*f* show a sarcastic continuation of the advice format by Kendra's brother Kevin: *and don't forget to take the Tupperware out of your oven before you turn it on*. This playful tease is explicitly cut off by Kevin's wife Wendy (*shush up*, line 6) during the last syllable of Kevin's turn. The cut-off is followed by laughter from Marci and Kendra herself. The instance is typical of several cases in the corpus where *shut up* or variations thereof are used non-seriously.

Extract (9) shows a non-playful use of a meta cut-off.

(9) SBC032 Handshakes all around

- 1 Tom2: so I SAILED on hEr for a little whlle.
 2 (0.44)
 3 uhm -
 4 (0.73)
 5 and thEn in F::IFty,;

6 fOrty-NINE i guess;
 7 (0.63)
 8 [uh a guy named-
 9 -> Tom3: [now let me [STOP you n[O:w -
 10 Tom2: [yeah; [yeah;
 11 yeah;
 12 Tom3: sInce you're of REcord;
 13 (1.13)
 14 Tom2: yeah;
 15 (0.44)
 16 Tom3: but (.) it's primArily because I wanna know –
 17 (0.49)
 18 when you SAY you were SAILIng now –
 19 (0.76)
 20 what were you DOIng;
 21 during these different PHAses;
 22 of [your SAILIng (life);
 23 Tom2: [i was SAILIng sEcond mAtE;

Tom3's turn *let me stop you now* (line 9) displays some elements of the kinds of halting mechanisms seen in the previous section. In this instance the meta cut-off brings about a closing following a point in sequence where the prior speaker has initiated a potential closing himself (lines 1 – 4): Tom2, who is new to the area, is talking to his new neighbors about his past life as a sailor. He reaches a potential point of sequence closure introduced by *so* (line 1). Subsequently he sets out to begin a new sequence, prefaced, however, by several hesitation markers such as *uhm* (line 2), pauses (lines 3 and 6) and prosodic lengthening (line 4). At this point Tom3 explicitly cuts him off with *now let me stop you now* (line 8). This is immediately granted by Tom2, who produces three agreement tokens *yeah yeah yeah* (lines 9f). Following his cut-off turn Tom3 provides two accounts for doing so: *since you're of record* (line 11) and *but its primarily because I wanna know* (line 15) before he goes on to ask more questions regarding the interrupted

participant's life as a sailor. This instance shows that a good deal of interactional work is required to achieve a smooth transition from an explicit cut-off to follow-up talk: Tom3's accounts express that it is only because he is so interested to hear more about Tom2's previous telling that he has prevented a new sequence from taking shape.

When meta cut-offs are neither playful nor mitigated and accounted for they take the form of highly confrontational social actions. Extract (10) shows an interaction between a mother and her two daughters. Previous to the transcribed extract one daughter, Kendra, has been involved in a prolonged argument with her mother Kitty.

(10) 042 Stay out of it

- 1 Kendr: <<f+h> i'm GROUNDEd for a MONTH and i dldn't DO NOTHing.
- 2 i went to VOLLEyball practice at CHURCH.
- 3 [i went up to the chUrch- >
- 4 Marle: [<<f+ extra h> MO:M;
- 5 she DIDn't s[pEnd the nIght;>
- 6 -> Kitty: [<extra f+h+harsh> HEY;
- 7 -> STAY OUT of it.
- 8 -> STAY OUT of it.
- 9 -> you're NOT inVOLVED in this.
- 10 (2.2)
- 11 Kendr: dOn't BOTHer with her.
- 12 she'll just get ANGry.

The disagreement is over Kendra's claim that she did not spend the night away from home and Kitty's unwillingness to believe her. Kendra's prosodic delivery is high in pitch register and loudness. When her sister Marlene joins in her defense *mom she didn't spend the night* (line 4f) her prosodic delivery is even higher than her sister's. In response to this Kitty yells at the top of her voice *hey stay out of it stay out of it you're not involved in this* (lines 6-9). This explicit cut-off is in direct response to Marlene's immediately preceding turn and receives no response. Indeed the pause of 2.2 seconds displays the instantly effective nature of this dramatically delivered verbalization:

Marlene does indeed *stay out of it*. As in the case of (1), *can I say something*, which also follows an extensive argument and involves extreme prosodic delivery, potential next participants refrain from taking the floor, at least for a short while. The mother's cut-off represents a serious exertion of interactional control and thus contributes to the assertion of a social hierarchy, in this case that between caregiver and child.

One underlying rule of spontaneous, non-institutional conversation is that turn allocation, turn duration and turn contribution type are freely negotiated (Heritage 2004). Explicitly cutting off another participant's turn is a clear violation of this right. It represents an act of controlling other participants' turn space and thus requires interactionally very delicate handling if confrontation is to be avoided. The above examples show that the turn design of meta cut-offs therefore either carefully mitigates against confrontation or implements outright, unmitigated control.

5. Summary and concluding remarks

The above data show how interactional negotiation is being verbalized in specific sequential environments. In the corpus meta turn-taking seems to come in three forms: meta self-starts, explicit prompts and meta cut-offs

With regard to meta self-starts and prompts a main distinction can be made between those cases that occur subsequent to sequential difficulties, such as turn competition, overlap, repair sequences or prolonged hesitation and pausing; and those that are preceded by no such problems. In the first category meta formulations are frequently used as last resorts after more conventional, implicit strategies have failed. In the case of meta self-starts this can be done to secure turn space; in the case of explicit prompts to initiate and/or elicit specific next actions. Meta self-starts employed in this function often prove to be highly efficient. In contrast, explicit self-starts that occur after trouble-free talk seem to be primarily used to structure sequences by seeking permission and legitimization for projected talk rather than to resolve immediate local turn-taking issues.

Meta cut-offs seem to be primarily designed to deal with repairables. Whether they are used as more or less straightforward repair initiations or whether they are employed with a more immediate aim to interrupt, playfully stop or take control over an ongoing sequence, all instances in the corpus show an orientation to addressing and correcting a

current course of action. Although in this aspect they are similar to meta self-starts that address interactional difficulties verbalized cut-offs do not seem to take the role of a last resort. Instead, they are the first and only practice chosen by participants to accomplish repair re-direction or control in those instances.

Meta turn-taking allows participants a higher degree of forward projection and, ultimately, interactional influence. When participants produce meta turns they are simultaneously engaged in turn-taking as such: meta turns are designed as turns, too. While their own design is fitted to the given interactional environment their content simultaneously shapes the immediately following interaction. While most other conversational actions also shape – more or less specifically – the immediately following sequential development such shaping rarely comes to the verbalized surface of talk. Instead, they are made manifest only as conditional relevance and in the form of specific linguistic projections through grammar (see Raymond 2003) and prosody (see Szczepek Reed 2006). As explicitness is not the norm in natural talk it allows participants an additional control mechanism to influence co-participants' immediate behaviour. While conventional, 'implicit' turn-taking strategies are strongly normative and shared by participants from the same cultural and linguistic background their implicitness nevertheless provides potential opportunities for evasion. In order to avoid next actions projected by prior talk participants can pretend they were not aware of a (implicit) projection. Avoidance is more difficult, or at least must take a different shape, when those projections have been made explicit. As much as verbalization is a strategy for exerting increased sequential influence it brings with it also an increased amount of commitment to a specific course of action. The same principle applies here in terms of opportunities for evasion. While the projections of default, implicit turns can be denied by their speakers meta formulations determine participants' sequential intentions in a much more concrete and accountable manner.

A final thought concerns the potential for meta turn-taking actions to provide participants with a brief opportunity to distance themselves from local interactional involvement. As speakers make their turn-related actions explicit they temporarily abandon their engagement in the 'doing' of those actions in order to declare, announce or negotiate over

them. This change from 'doing action' to 'doing talk' momentarily allows participants to step outside their direct involvement with others in order to overtly manage the mechanics of conversation. In doing so they briefly make their motives and interpretations transparent to both recipients and analysts alike.

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Appendix

Transcription Conventions (adapted from Selting *et al.* 1998)

Pauses and lengthening

(.)	micro-pause
(2.85)	measured pause
:::	lengthening

Accents

ACCent	primary accent
Accent	secondary accent

Intonation unit-final pitch movements

?	rise-to-high
,	rise-to-mid
-	level
;	fall-to-mid
.	fall-to-low

Pitch step-up/step down

↑	pitch step up
↓	pitch step down

Change of pitch register

<<l> >	low pitch register
<<h> >	high pitch register

Volume and tempo changes

<<f> >	forte
<<p> >	piano
<<all> >	allegro
<<len> >	lento

Breathing

.h, .hh, .hhh	breathing in
h, hh, hhh	breathing out

Other conventions

[overlap of two or more speakers
[
=	latching of next turns
()	unintelligible passage
(such)	presumed wording
->	transcript line referred to in the text

¹ Cf. Auer 1996; Ford *et al.* 1996; Ford and Thompson 1996; Fox 2001; French and Local 1986; Goodwin 1980; Kim 1997; Li 2013; Local *et al.* 1985; Local *et al.* 1986; Ogden 2001; 2004; Rossano *et al.* 2009; de Ruiter *et al.* 2006; Sacks *et al.* 1974; Selting 1996; 2000; Streeck & Hartge 1992; Szczepek Reed 2004; Tanaka 1999; Wells and Peppè 1996; Wells and Macfarlane 1998.